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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MEXICO 003676

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/03/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MX](#)  
SUBJECT: ELECTION DAY IN MEXICO: NOT OVER YET

REF: A. MEXICO 3662  
[1](#)B. MEXICO 3422  
[1](#)C. MEXICO 3309

Classified By: Ambassador Antonio O. Garza, Jr. for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Election day was calm in Mexico, marked by good turnout and an orderly process. But even a good process does not always provide an immediate result with a closely divided electorate. Electoral authorities insist the country will have to wait for the July 5 official count to know the winner. That could drag on into July 6 and maybe even July [1](#)7. Late July 2, the head of Mexico's Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) urged the parties to wait for IFE to do its job. President Fox delivered the same message. Within minutes, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador reacted to these pleas by declaring himself the victor, citing unnamed polls, and promising to defend his victory. Felipe Calderon responded with his own victory declaration, citing by name several polls and results which showed him with a narrow lead. Calderon paid more deference to IFE than Lopez Obrador, but his message was equally clear. Preliminary results or PREP (97.2 percent of polling stations reporting as of 12:30 pm EDT July 3) show Calderon with a one point lead. If the July 5 official count mirrors this, we expect the race to be challenged in the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TEPJF). End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) The Embassy fielded 92 observers on election day in 19 cities. Most of our observers were in Mexico City and the cities where we have consulates, but we also sent observers to potential trouble spots such as Oaxaca, scene of a long-running, violent teachers' strike. We saw stronger than expected turnout (probably just short of the 61 percent seen in Mexico's historic 2000 election), and calm voters (with the exceptions noted below). IFE claims it was able to install all but eight of over 130,000 polling stations planned.

[1](#)3. (C) As in past elections, there were problems with polling stations opening late. Although several of our observers noted this problem, IFE showed us statistics indicating they performed better in this regard than in 2003 or 2000. There were scattered media reports of officials from all three major parties violating election laws by suborning voters with offers of goods or cash.

[1](#)4. (U) Also as in past elections, there were problems with "special" polling stations running out of ballots. Because Mexico has no in-country absentee voting, its electoral laws require that voters away from home on election day be allowed to cast their ballots at designated special polling stations (often in airports, bus stations, etc.). Because eligibility for using a special polling station is defined broadly, a voter can do it even in his hometown. To limit the possibilities for fraud, the parties insist that IFE limit the total number of ballots thus available (600,000

nationwide). Special polling stations in high demand areas therefore see long waiting times for voters (several hours), and they quickly run out of ballots, angering those who arrive too late. Observers in Mexico City, Monterrey, and Oaxaca saw spontaneous demonstrations at special polling stations as a result of this problem. We do not yet have an official estimate of how many were unable to vote because of this problem.

15. (C) The last polls released before the election showed Lopez Obrador and Calderon in a statistical dead heat, and the exit poll results leaked to us during the day told the same story. When the embargo on publishing exit polls ended at 9:00 pm EDT, Mexican media outlets declined to release their results. When the time came at 12:00 am EDT for IFE to release its quick count results, its technical committee said, and IFE head Luis Carlos Ugalde reported to the nation, that the margin of error made it impossible to offer a prediction. The PAN and PRD immediately began agitating for the quick count results, but IFE refused to budge. Ugalde praised the voters and election officials for what he called an impeccable election day. He made clear that Mexicans should look to July 5 and the official district by district ballot count scheduled for that date. In so doing, he seemed to tacitly dismiss the PREP system, into which IFE has poured considerable effort. The PREP results (based on reporting of the tally sheets from each polling station) continue to roll in and suggest a very narrow Calderon victory, approximately one percent, fewer than 400,000 votes. The July 5 count in each of IFE's 300 districts, a formality in most elections, has suddenly acquired enormous significance, and the normally pro forma process of adding up polling station tally sheets at the district level will surely receive greater scrutiny from the parties than ever before. An IFE source told us the

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July 5 process could drag on into July 6 and maybe even July 17.

16. (U) Shortly after Ugalde and then Fox spoke, Lopez Obrador addressed the cameras from his election night headquarters. He professed respect for Mexico's institutions and for IFE's eventual results, but then claimed he had won. He said he had exit polls showing he was at least 500,000 votes ahead and promised to keep the citizens informed. Recalling his promise to respect the result even if he lost by one vote, he called on the electoral institutions to respect "our results" ("nuestros resultados"). He then said that starting July 3 and in the coming days as this result was confirmed, he would begin work with the various sectors of society on a national agenda. He offered his hand to his opponents and called on them to put Mexico's interests first. From there, Lopez Obrador went to Mexico City's main plaza, the Zocalo, where repeated his claim of victory based on exit polls and regretted that IFE had not released results. He promised to defend his victory and prevent anyone from erasing the results. He said he would wait for the July 5 count and urged his supporters to remain vigilant, promising that he and his party would keep them informed. In a twist on his campaign slogan ("smile, we are going to win") he ended by saying "smile, we won."

17. (U) Shortly after Lopez Obrador spoke, Calderon made a televised address. He was careful to acknowledge IFE's primacy in counting votes, but he then named several exit polls and listed their results, all showing him with a narrow lead. The PRI, represented by its president, had spoken earlier in the evening and essentially disparaged all polling and insisted that the country wait for the official results. Despite the PRI's pleas, it appears that the PAN won gubernatorial races in Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Morelos. As expected, the PRD won the race for Mexico City mayor. The PAN, at least so far, appears to be leading in the congressional races, cutting into the PRI's numbers, although no party will have a majority.

18. (C) Comment: Lopez Obrador's remarks were unhelpful. Calderon at least had the excuse of being put on the spot by Lopez Obrador, and he did express more respect for the electoral authorities. There is a well-defined process here (see refs b and c), and it is unfortunate that the leading candidates have anticipated its outcome. The PREP results, which should be complete July 3, will represent the outcome in close to 100 percent of Mexico's polling stations as based on the tally sheets from those stations. However, with margins razor thin, even the PREP may not give us the answer.

In any case, IFE is moving with great caution, effectively ignoring the PREP and trying to focus everyone on the July 5 ballot count which will take place in each of Mexico's 300 electoral districts. Completion of the July 5 count starts the four-day clock for filing judicial complaints. In such a close race, we should expect complaints. The TEPJF must rule on those complaints not later than August 31 and declare the presidential election results official not later than September 6. Although the TEPJF has said it will try to rule as quickly as possible, we may be in for a wait. We expect the TEPJF to be reluctant to overturn the results of IFE's July 5 count, but all signs now point to a painfully narrow margin in that count, meaning that it will be difficult for the TEPJF to apply its "no harm, no foul" rule to any improprieties it might find.

19. (C) The immediate question is what Lopez Obrador will do if the July 5 tally goes against him. His July 2 comments calling on the authorities to respect his results and promising to defend his victory suggest he will not go gracefully. While we do not expect violence, large demonstrations by Lopez Obrador's supporters are a distinct possibility if the July 5 count does not go his way. In the end, public confidence in IFE and the TEPJF, which polls indicate is high, will be very important. End comment.

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